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NEW OSAKE IN AN OLD BOTTLE

THE NEW JAPANESE PM FUMIO KISHIDA

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Abstract

Since World War II, Japan's identity has been manifested into a pacifist nation and is considered as a pariah in the international world order. In recent years, however, international relations scholars have questioned Japan's 'pacifist' identity as an island nation, which is now striving to become a 'normal power'. The former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe cemented the roots of a 'New Japan,' where his foreign and defense policy ushers the new incumbent leaders like Fumio Kishida. The paper argues that Kishida follows the strategic maps inherited from Abe; however, Tokyo is going through some tectonic changes in the foreign and security policy realm. The assertiveness of China in the Indo-Pacific region and Putin's recent move of military action in Eastern Europe has made the Japanese political echelons nervous. The growing threats have propelled Tokyo to reconsider its current security doctrine under new Prime Minister Kishida Fumio. His dovish penchant suggests that substantial changes lie ahead for the nation and his party.

Introduction

Japan's new Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida passed his first political test and guided the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to victory in the lower house election on 31 Oct, 2021(BBC 2022). Former Prime minister Yoshihide Suga stepped aside from office only after a year of turbulent tenure in office. Suga faced harsh public disapproval for slow vaccine rollout, post-Olympic waves of Covid-19, economic and market stagnation, and the mounting security threats coming to the nation's shore.

Prime Minister Kishida, however, managed to shore up his political position in parliamentary elections when LDP exceeded its expectations and retained majority seats in Diet. His grand win provided him plethora of political breathing space with a mandate to begin implementing his foreign, security, and domestic policy agenda. Kishida is now leading Japan through various domestic and international challenges pertaining to foreign and defense policy. On the security dimension, the apprehensions are rising tensions around the Taiwan strait, the rising Chinese

pressure and military capabilities in the East and South China seas, North Korean provocation, and engaging the 'resurgent Russia.'

On the economic dimension, Prime Minister Kishida pledged to strengthen Japan's economic security by stabilizing supply chains and knocking out Chinese intellectual property theft and other associated predatory practices.¹ Kishida is working hard to recover the domestic LDP's appeal, delivering his promise of a new form of Capitalism' helping Japan recover from the Pandemic and spread the benefits of growth more equitably as envisioned by the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The initial days of Kishida's working style have some imprints of Abe's legacy.²

Climbing the political ladder and continuity of Abe's Legacy

The political victory of Fumio Kishida in the general election and the leadership race of LDP has been attributed to the presence and tricky maneuvering of the former PM Shinzo Abe. Deciphering the process leading to Kishida's triumph indicates something more than just a quest for influence on Abe's part. Rather it would be wise to say that Abe's deft interventions in the election of leadership were designed to achieve something more ambitious, namely a Tokyo administration that can be expected to pursue the core planks of Abe's policy ambition. Abe's determination to achieve policy implementation longevity, not the desire for personal orchestration within the party, enabled Kishida's ascending to the throne as the 100th prime minister.

¹ Tatlow, Didi, and Afra Herr. 2022. "Japan's 'Economic Security' Measures: A Model for Managing China's Rise." www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/keizai_anzen_hosyohousei/dai4/teigen.pdf.

² Ito, Takatoshi. 2021. "Where Will Fumio Kishida Take Japan? By Takatoshi Ito - Project Syndicate." <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/fumio-kishida-economic-policy-plan-by-takatoshi-ito-2021-10?barrier=accesspay>.

Kishida's foreign and defense policy speeches for the LDP leadership race touched all the right notes with Abe's ambition. Kishida's confidence in Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) as a vehicle to protect and promote democracy has aligned well with Abe's vision of 'maritime democracy' rhetoric used to describe regional goals. Kishida also exhorted the need for Tokyo to boost its defense capabilities, including raising the defense budget and deployment of Aegis offshore missiles to target the enemy bases during contingencies.

Similarly, Fumio Kishida was bullish during the election campaign on the need for closer integration of Japan Maritime Self-defense forces and paramilitary to combat Chinese incursion in the East China Sea. Another policy plank of Abe that Kishida followed was the commitment to return all Japanese abductees from the DPRK. In short, Kishida's foreign and defense policy platform echoed the fundamental voice that mattered to Shinzo Abe the most without raising any red flag for Abe or his supporters within the LDP faction.

Kishida cannot be called a hard right-wing politician by any stretch of the imagination. However, the critical point is that he played the game on the right court, securing his position as Japan's next prime minister. Significantly this means the success and longevity of his office will depend on the ongoing support of the right in the party. In policy continuity and implementation terms, this requires Kishida to complete the policy trajectory envisioned by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

During the last decade, the Abe administration endeavored to overcome the 'apology politics' prominent in post-war Japan. Abe's regime instead sought Japan's national identity as a 'Normal State.' Japan portrayed itself as a “proactive contributor of peace,” rather than a pacifist state. This helped Japan to realize its potential to overcome constitutional constraints. Notably, the 2015 security policy legislation's passing wrote a new chapter in Japan's security discourse. Similarly, Abe's diplomacy with India facilitated the re-emergence of QUAD, which was shaped by FOIP later, another signature moves by Shinzo Abe.

Abe's sudden departure from the chair in 2020 owing to health issues, shocked the world and meant that other vital planks of Abe's vision were unrealized.³ Abe's determination to revise the pacifist constitution for acknowledging the legality of SDF was at the top of the list of smothered policy ambition. Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the cancelling of peace talks around the Kuril Islands have made Tokyo's political rank apprehensive and upset. China's assertiveness in the South China Sea through numerous incursions into Japan's and Taiwan's ADZ provided convenient fodder for the hawkish appeals to democratic idealism that accompanied foreign and security policy ambition under Abe. Under Fumio Kishida, we can expect Tokyo to work arduously to strengthen QUAD, support Australia's defense capabilities, invest in the border regions of India and bolster the strategic infrastructure, and possibly even aspire to acquire pre-emptive strike capability in Japan's defense arsenal.

Kishida Doctrine and Challenges

Even after his retirement, former prime minister Abe cast a shadow over Japan's foreign and defense policies. Fumio Kishida is finding it hard to emerge from the shadow of Shinzo Abe. Kishida is facing high expectations from Abe's deft diplomacy because he was the longest-serving foreign minister (2012-17) after the post-war period. However, Kishida never got much of the limelight because Shinzo Abe was the de-facto foreign minister.

Kishida is most remembered in the Japanese political sphere for his two flawed accords with the Seoul administration in 2015. After much domestic jousting, Tokyo and Seoul reached a controversial agreement on the UNESCO world heritage designation for Meiji industrial sites.

³ Sposato, William. 2020. "Shinzo Abe Leaves Office With Many Victories but Little Popularity."

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/28/shinzo-abe-resigns-japan-prime-minister-unloved-successful/>.

Tokyo affirmed that Koreans were ‘forced’ to work at the industrial sites.⁴ This momentary feel-good moment of bilateral relationship between Japan and South Korea was short lived, and evaporated by Kishida’s comment, that being forced to work is different from forced labour.⁵

Why Kishida felt to make this dubious distinction is uncertain; however, he was probably concerned that the right-wing faction in Japan might criticize him. However, the goodwill gesture disappeared with time, making Japan look more discourteous than remorseful. This incident revealed a deeper problem in Japan's domestic politics: under the Abe administration, relations with the immediate neighbourhood are manifested in revisionism, becoming more vocal and aggressive in denying, shifting, and downplaying the responsibility for abuses committed by imperial Japan. Their vindicating narrative of Japan's shared past with Asia has been mainstreamed domestically, impacting regional relations.⁶

The most controversial deal of the Kishida was at the end of 2015 regarding comfort women.⁷ The so-called revolutionary deal touted as a final and irreversible agreement was dead on arrival for several reasons—the prominent reason being the absence of a public apology by Shinzo Abe. Second-hand reports of a phone call with then-South Korean President Park Geun-Hye fell short of the grand gesture needed to heal this deep wound by Japan. Subsequently, Abe denied President

⁴ Nikolai Johnsen. 2021. “Katō Kōko’s Meiji Industrial Revolution – Forgetting Forced Labor to Celebrate Japan’s World Heritage Sites – Part 1 | The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 19(23): 2–5. <https://apjjf.org/2021/23/Johnsen.html>.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2013. “Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan on Adoption of the ‘National Security Strategy (NSS)’ | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.” https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000141.html.

⁶ Saaler, Sven. 2016. “Nationalism and History in Contemporary Japan.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 14.

⁷ Matsuo, Terrence. 2020. “The Comfort Women Agreement 5 Years On - Korea Economic Institute of America.” <https://keia.org/the-peninsula/the-comfort-women-agreement-5-years-on/>.

Moon Jae-in's request for a public apology over comfort women.⁸ It may not be unfair to read too much into the silver linings of diplomatic fiascos. However, Kishida may have had his hands tied to only implement Abe's foreign policy agenda.

Looking forward, Fumio Kishida inherits the same set of foreign policy directives and challenges that Abe and Yoshihide Suga made little headway on. Despite all the global fanfare and global grandstanding, Tobias Harris (2020) has argued that Shinzo Abe achieved remarkably little, especially in terms of extended regional diplomacy.⁹ Relationships with China and South Korea remained chilly under the Abe administration, with no advancement in territorial dispute resolution. Nor was there any significant improvement in the abduction cases with Pyongyang. In a significant bid to solve the northern border issue with Russia, Abe met Putin numerous times. However, the efforts failed with the latest curtailment of the peace talks.¹⁰ Russia aggressive stance in Eastern Europe poses a significant challenge for the Kishida administration, as the latter is bracing themselves for some tough diplomatic talks.

From the current political build-ups and the method Kishida reacts, it is probably too much to expect a distinctive Kishida Doctrine. It is more likely that he will follow the path made by Shinzo Abe on security and diplomacy. This means continuity at a time when Tokyo might benefit by upping the diplomatic ballgame by constructively engaging with adversaries. A priority should be rescheduling the summit that Shinzo Abe had planned with Chinese premier Xi Jinping in Apr 2020, which was later called off due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Japan and China have much to discuss as they mark the 50th anniversary of the normalization of relations. To up the ante against the regional controversies, Japan is revisiting its National Security Strategy.

⁸Chang, Jae. 2019. "View of Apology Politics | The Cornell Diplomat."

<https://journals.library.cornell.edu/index.php/tcd/article/view/579/580>

⁹ Harris, Tobias S. 2020. *The Iconoclast : Shinzō Abe and the New Japan*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

¹⁰ Johnston, Eric. 2022. "Japan Slams Russia's Decision to Suspend Peace Treaty Talks | The Japan Times."

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/22/national/russia-japan-peace-treaty-talks-halted/>.

Japan revising National Security Strategy under Kishida

The new Japanese government of Kishida has two important defence related issues in the bag. The first, Tokyo has to craft a new National Security Strategy (NSS) by the end of 2022. The new policy paper will replace the security policy ombudsman of 2013.¹¹ In the last election, the conservative LDP supported an increase of Japan's defense budget up to 2 percent.¹² This means the budget can rise to US \$ 100 billion. Currently, the budget for self-defense forces stands at 1.3% of GDP, which amounts to around US \$ 48 Billion.

Furthermore, Japan compared to its neighboring countries like China and Russia, which are the second and fourth-largest defense spenders- Japan's defense allocation is far timid. According to SIPRI data Japan is ranked ninth overall, followed by South Korea by a small margin.¹³ There was a vast disparity in Japan's defense spending and ranking in the late 20th century when Tokyo stood as the world's third-largest defense spender, with a budget allocation of 20% more than China's.¹⁴

The combined defense budget for 2022 (Apr 2022-23) includes an additional supplementary budget approved in the fiscal year 2021, which amounts to 6.1 trillion yen. The combined figure is equivalent to 1.09% of GDP. However, for fiscal 2022, the budget is set at mere 5.4 trillion yen, which is less than 1% of Japan's GDP. The one percent limit is ingrained in Japan's political and

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 2013. "Statement by Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan on Adoption of the 'National Security Strategy (NSS)' | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan." https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000141.html.

¹² Takahashi, Kosuke & Dominguez, Gabriel. 2021. "Japan's LDP Vows to Double Defence Spending amid 'increasingly Severe Security Environment'." <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/japans-ldp-vows-to-double-defence-spending-amid-increasingly-severe-security-environment>.

¹³ SIPRI. 2021. "TRENDS IN WORLD MILITARY EXPENDITURE, 2020." https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/fs_2104_milex_0.pdf.

¹⁴ Matthews, Ron., Keisuke. Matsuyama, and 松山敬左(1939-). 1993. "Japan's Military Renaissance?" : 251.

social psyche. However, it has been breached before and will be in the future, too, as Tokyo needs state-of-the-art technology, defense equipment to fight new generation warfare creating deterrent capabilities.

These are significant policy road maps for Japan to transition from an economic powerhouse to a nation with full strategic autonomy and responsibility in the region. Moreover, the demand for amending the Constitution's Article 9, which limits the use of the self-defense forces (SDF), could reach fruition under Fumio Kishida since he enjoys the full support of his coalition partner Komeito and the *Nippon Ishin no Kai*. The 1947 peace Constitution has never been amended in the past; that requires approval by a robust two-thirds majority in both Diet chambers.¹⁵

These debates are hardly new, whether amending the constitution, increasing the defense budget cap, enhancing military capability, or taking the nuclear option. They have shaped into reality in the context of radically altered geo-security environments in Japan's neighborhoods and beyond. Japan is no longer a reactive or pacifist state of the past or even a civilian power. Japan has stopped being a silent watchdog of international affairs and has become an assertive power committed to safeguarding its country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The historical baggage of pacifist idealism has paved the way for proactive pacifism – which Fumio Kishida calls realist diplomacy for a new era.¹⁶

Revision of the national security strategy and future defense plans reassess Tokyo's perception of Beijing. Recent increasing Chinese activities around Senkaku/ Diaoyu Island and infringement on Taiwan's territory directly affect Japan's security ambitions. Furthermore, Pangong's regular ballistic projectiles traveling over Japan threaten Japan's security architecture. Japan has to

¹⁵ Nikkei Asia. 2021. “Bill to Amend Law on Revising Japan Constitution to Pass Diet - Nikkei Asia.”
<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Bill-to-amend-law-on-revising-Japan-constitution-to-pass-Diet> .

¹⁶ Kishida, Fumio. 2022. “Policy Speech by Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio to the 208th Session of the Diet (Speeches and Statements by the Prime Minister) | Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet.”
https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202201/_00009.html.

vigorously debate how to develop different state-of-the-art capabilities to undertake pre-emptive strikes against enemy bases in a dire time. This policy direction needs to upgrade Japan's missile technology and capabilities. Putin's military action in Ukraine in late Feb 2022 has added a new dimension to Japan's security dilemma.¹⁷ In February, following Moscow's military invasion of Eastern Europe, Tokyo followed its western brethren and imposed tough sanctions on Russia. In addition to that, Japan has provided military and financial related assistance to Ukraine, including supplying bulletproof vests and helmets (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2022). Any prospects of normalizing Russian-Japan relations have now become virtually impossible. What is shaking the defense architects of Japan is the strengthening of Russia-China ties.¹⁸

Road Ahead for Kishida

When Shinzo Abe stepped down in 2020, Yoshihide Suga followed Abe's policy blueprint. After succeeding Suga, the current Japanese PM, Kishida, endorsed Abe's foreign and security policies.¹⁹ It is quite noteworthy that Kishida became the longest-serving foreign minister after the post-war period and had a strong stint as defense minister in the Shinzo Abe cabinet. Japan observers expect continuity in foreign and security policy.

As noted earlier, the Kishida government has already had some big announcements regarding revising some key policies adopted a year ago to fit into rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances around Japan. The past consensus of 1% of GDP on defense spending is also likely to be stretched given the neo arms race in Asia pacific. While the Liberal faction of LDP has

¹⁷ Easton, Yukari. 2022. "What Ukraine Means for Japan – The Diplomat." <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/what-ukraine-means-for-japan/>.

¹⁸ Rich, Motoko & Inoue, Makiko. 2022. "Japan, Hesitant to Impose Sanctions on Russia in 2014, Embraces Them Now. One Reason, China." <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/24/world/europe/japan-russia-sanctions.html>.

¹⁹ Jain, Purnendra. 2021. "Meet Japan's New PM." <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/meet-japan-s-new-pm>.

always regarded the one-percent limit as sacrosanct, Kishida, like former PM Abe, is likely not to be bound by the engraved pacifist tradition.

To be sure, Japan will still be under the Washington security umbrella, even though the US resources are currently declining and remained stretched in the Asia Pacific and Europe. Furthermore, the Biden administration will shift its strategic lens to Europe due to Putin's military invasion of Ukraine. For Japan, Xi Jinping's expansionist dreams and Pyongyang nuclear sword will hover around Tokyo's head. It is, therefore, possible that Japan may move away from the tradition of 'deterrence for Japan by the US' towards 'deterrence of Japan by Japan'- at least to some extent. Thus, the need of the hour for Japan is creating credible state-of-the-art missile defence capacity and upgrading the existing defence arsenal.

Conclusion

There is no denying that Japan's foreign and defence policy has undergone some tectonic transformations since the end of the cold war. More substantive changes are sure to happen in the coming years. The policy shift is so far incremental and transparent, and Japan has still not put the pacifist tradition into the void.

As of now, the constitution is intact so does the peace clause. Japan has remained a non-nuclear state by mainly adhering to the three non-nuclear principles. Its security capability has remained in the defensive net rather than offensive mode. Defence spending to be double will take an ample amount of time, despite being a core objective of LDP. Nor is Japan going gaga on nuclear weapons and continuing to discourage the weapon of Satan on its soil despite discussions of hosting US nuclear weapons.

Although its security dependence will continue to be on the US shoulder, at the same time, Tokyo has already diversified its strategic cooperation and densified security ties with some critical upcoming superpowers. This includes signing a reciprocal access agreement with Australia in Jan 2022 and establishing close partnerships with European nations while expanding security ties with like-minded powers in the Indo-Pacific, such as India.

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